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MIDDLE WITCH

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MIDDLE WITCH

by

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Report

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Dedication

For Amelia, Melina, and Gabriel.

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Abstract

Middle Witch

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Andrew Shea

This report is a process memoir of the stages of development, pre-production, production, and post-production for my thesis film, *Middle Witch*. It gives context to my experiences as a graduate student working toward my MFA in film production, explores the forces that influence my work, and tracks my development as a filmmaker.

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1: Introductions to Power

Hunger is the beginning of every story.

-Kristiana Willsey (*The Toast*, 2014)

The summer before I turned twelve I made my own VHS copy of *Kiki's Delivery Service*, a movie I had checked out from the public library at least four times already. Hayao Miyazaki's elegant children's film about a young witch striking out on her own for the first time had made an enormous impression on me; I loved Kiki and her little rented room over the bakery and the fact that she could fly a broom until suddenly and heart-breakingly she just couldn't. Kiki's magic was unreliable, and at eleven, unsure of myself and uncomfortable in my own skin, I was discovering that my own magic was fickle too. What I want you to understand is this: I saw myself reflected in a story and it gave me permission to struggle.

But I also grew up fat, mixed-race, and a girl, so seeing myself well-reflected in any kind of popular media was incredibly rare. And that absence felt like a silencing. When the dominant narrative recognizes only one kind of hero and most minority characters on the entertainment landscape are flat caricatures or demeaned objects, the damage—both cultural and personal—is profound. But I believe it follows that the right stories told well can be powerful engines for change.

I crave television and films now that would have liberated eleven-year-old me: smart, accessible, genre media that privileges the voices of women and girls of color and size and creates safe spaces for many identities. I intend to make such media the project of my career.

2: *Middle Witch*

Today I am two weeks from finishing my MFA in film and media production at the University of Texas at Austin. For the last three and a half years I've been immersed in coursework for screenwriting, cinematography, editing, animation, documentary, producing, and directing. In that time I've directed, written, and edited three narrative films, all of them coming-of-age stories exploring the intersections of science fiction and girlhood.

The first of those films, *Launch Sequence*, was a seven-minute live-action short shot on 16mm. It followed a thirteen-year-old girl on the day she lets a bird loose in the engine room of the freighter starship her mother pilots—and featured practical tricks, miniatures, and a roughly-hewn production design aesthetic.

My second-year film, *Ronnie Monsters* was a contemporary coming-of-age school story with a supernatural twist. Back from summer vacation with no best friend and a terrifying, secret, monster arm, Ronnie Frank-Martínez just wants to survive the first day of school. Shot digitally, the film made use of spills of gem-toned light in a dusty, mundane environment. For the monster-arm we used a combination of makeup, hand-made, and subtle, hand-drawn animation.

Middle Witch, my third and culminating film, is a contemporary folktale about the changing relationship between three young sisters. Larger in scale and story than the two films that came before, the twenty minute live-action short follows thirteen-year-old middle sister and stubborn witch-in-training Tasha Carver on the day she's sent to buy milk from the convenience store but steals an enormous magic egg instead.

Tasha comes across the egg while taking a forbidden shortcut through an unusual abandoned lot, and the theft lures a vengeful bird monster straight home to Tasha's

sisters. When the creature snatches eleven-year-old Cece right out of the backyard, Tasha and eldest sister Denise must race to the rescue across a vast wasteland, tackling obstacle after magical obstacle and grappling with their own shortcomings. At the eleventh hour Denise steps in a curse and turns to concrete, and it falls to Tasha to make the final exchange—stolen egg for stolen sister—finally earning both sisters’ confidence.

Middle Witch grew out of a deep love for adventure fantasies like *The NeverEnding Story* and *The Goonies*. But from the beginning it was also an attempt to reframe coming-of-age fantasy—a genre overwhelmingly populated with white male heroes—as a space for honoring girlhood and the voices of girls of color. The Carver sisters are adolescent witches of color, each of them complex, whole characters, and their journey out into the Lot embodies that larger effort.

On a different level, my thesis came out of my desire to orchestrate the unusual narrative logic of folktales in a fresh setting. Lately when repackaged for popular consumption the intrinsic strangeness of old folklore is much diminished. But in *Middle Witch* I aim to tell a fairy story that keeps its teeth sharp and its heroines neither charming nor easily-digestible but human and messy and dark.

In order to house these characters, I drew on the mythic qualities of abandoned public spaces. A vast and decaying industrial lot, frightfully overgrown and infused with magic, can have all the attributes of Baba Yaga’s dark forest, making it a fine testing ground for three young, contemporary witches who struggle against each other as much as they struggle to survive.

My visual plan for *Middle Witch* stemmed from that core. Like an industrial space overtaken by nature, the color palette my cinematographer Jim Hickcox and I developed for the film was earthy and rich: greens and browns and grays shot through flashes of

gold and teal and violet. (Please see the color palette and representative photograph in Appendix B).

Taking a cue from the fairy tales of Hayao Miyazaki and John Sayles' *The Secret of Roan Inish*, Jim's camera lingers in wides, on skies and landscapes, to emphasize the relationship between the girls and their environment, to mark gently the passage of time. And when the girls are in motion, the camera glides swiftly alongside; when they focus on tasks or each other, the camera hovers close.



Figure 1: A shot from Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*



Figure 2: A shot from John Sayles' *The Secret of Roan Inish*

Inspired by the elegant optical trickery and traditional creature effects of films like Wolfgang Peterson's *The NeverEnding Story* and Walter Murch's *Return to Oz*, my team and I created the magic of *Middle Witch* with practical effects, puppetry, and only the most minimal, naturalistic digital effects. And in the final film, these fantastic elements are always secondary to story and character.



Figure 3: A puppet from Wolfgang Peterson's *The NeverEnding Story*



Figure 4: Walter Murch's *Return to Oz*: slices of stone shot as landscapes

3: Incubation

Curating images has always played an important role in the early development of any of my projects. Until a script is really cooking, I spend as much time picking through photos and art as I do writing. If a sturdy logline is my north star, then a carefully tended set of guiding images are my bearing constellations. While *Middle Witch* was brewing, I was spending a lot of time looking at concrete art, misty landscapes, geometric arrangements of sacred objects, and a fierce portrait of a young women holding a knife.



Figure 5: Concrete statues by Anselm Kiefer from Sophie Fiennes' *Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow*

These images would help me set rules for the tone and shape of the world of my script. Throughout rewrites they would keep me honest. And leading into production they were a useful shorthand for communicating with my art department, gaffer, costume designer, and the special artist whose entire role was to build tiny landscapes.

I can also point to two pieces of storytelling that deeply influenced my thesis script. One is James Cameron's *Aliens*, the space thriller in which the iconic survivor

Ellen Ripley rescues, loses, and then rescues again a small girl named Newt in a terraforming facility infested by a hive of aliens and their eggs. The other is Joy Williams' crystalline short story "Baba Iaga and the Pelican Child"—a new fairy tale in the tradition of Russian Baba Yaga stories, about an old witch who has a pelican for a daughter. When scientific illustrator James Audubon kills the pelican daughter, the witch's talking cat is the only one who can bring her back to life (by warming her in the oven).

Though these two stories are significantly different in tone, logic, and medium, the points where they intersect affected me deeply. They tapped into what I wanted to be writing about: women protecting each other, the ways in which girlhood is inextricably tangled with learning to fight back, and monsters who push us to save ourselves. On a more literal level, I also wanted to tell a story about an egg, a nest, and a series of impossible tasks. Those are the seeds at the root of *Middle Witch*.

Writing this script was an unusual joy. It did not come quickly, but it did come steadily, one scene rolling in after the other. Where screenwriting had felt like a terrible struggle with my last film, this time was a gift.

That being said, I still went through five or six rewrites, and I still needed to burn through half of those easy scenes before I had gotten to the meat of the fairy tale. I also avoided writing the scene where Denise and Tasha cross the white concrete for months. Or to be more precise: I wrote it once and refused to look too closely at it because I knew

something was wrong with it. Three months out from production, I sat down with my producers Kelly and Natalie to do some final script notes. The version they read had Denise stopping short on a piece of cursed white concrete. Only her foot turns to stone and fuses to the ground.

I believe it was Natalie who said, “It’s not hard enough yet. Tasha has to really think that she’s lost everything. I think Denise has to turn completely to stone.” She was absolutely right. There are so many reasons not to turn a character to stone. It is expensive whether you do it practically or in post. It is difficult for an actor. It is tricky to shoot. But in the end the story’s need trumped them all. I went home that night and rewrote the scene.

Written the first time, I had coasted on easy, pat emotion. But this time I knew I was writing a death scene. Denise would only have moments before her body was completely encased. I thought, “What would I say to my own sister if I one minute of oxygen and no hope of rescue? If I were abandoning her in a terrible place?” That scene, revived by higher stakes, would eventually become the heart of the finished film, as it should have been from the very beginning. (Please see the Appendix A to read the final script.)

My thesis script was smaller in scale during the beginning stages of writing, but some generous funding from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA encouraged me to broaden the scope of the story. I was excited for the opportunity to attempt world-building a grander scale and ended up with an ambitious script that called for multiple

difficult locations, several animals, young actors, time-consuming effects work, and an enormous crew. It was by far the largest project I'd ever tackled, but as I headed into pre-production, I had a crack team of collaborators by my side.

4: Pre-Production

First on board were my producer Kelly Ota and DP Jim Hickcox, two beloved, fellow filmmakers in the RTF program with whom I'd collaborated in the past. Then came Natalie Shea, an undergrad and former student of mine who proved a natural leader and staunch advocate. The three of them brought different experiences and priorities to the table, and together they kept the ship afloat throughout our busy pre-production. Perhaps most importantly they believed very strongly in the project.

Next came Jason Vines, a local special effects artist who became our chief creature effects guru, and Professor Ben Bays who took on consulting for post VFX. Beginning in February and continuing on until production in May, the whole team was involved in the design and testing of puppets and robots and miniatures. Every other weekend we were shooting footage of nest walk-cycles, bird beak mechanics, and glowing eggs and then bringing them into After Effects to composite and enhance. It was an complicated and involved process, but also a necessary and creatively thrilling one. (Please see Appendix C for pictures of the design stages for each of the various creatures.)

Meanwhile our location manager Lauren Kinsler was scouting parking lots and empty warehouses all over Austin and our Kickstarter video director Mariam Aziz had begun shooting material to support our crowd-funding campaign. Despite the generous Princess Grace Award support, the film was quickly outgrowing its budget. With Mariam's hard work and an energetic gang of undergrad social media assistants out drumming up support, we were able to raise enough money to keep moving forward

toward production. Additional support in the form of an Austin Film Society production grant and a Moody Innovation Award from the RTF department further bolstered the film.

Also central to our pre-production machine was our casting director, Maddy Bethard, another brilliant undergrad. Brought on board midway through the semester, Maddy shared my affinity for stories about girlhood and launched into the hunt for our trio of witches with energy.

I was hell-bent on casting girls of color, but three years of repeating the experiment has taught me that no matter how exacting the casting call is, a whole barrel of white actors describing how tan they can get will submit themselves for the roles. So to broaden our pool Maddy reached out to local talent agencies and high school drama teachers. We brought in some thirty girls for the role of Tasha, and after weeks of seeing actors who simply weren't right for the role, I was despairing of ever finding anyone. But then Maddy brought in thirteen-year-old Paeka to read for the role, and it was like a light turning on. She was scrappy and vulnerable all at once, her hair slightly messy and a tentative chip on her shoulder. After the day's auditions had ended, Maddy said, "Paeka's Tasha is a fighter."

And that hits at the core of why the character of Tasha is important to me. Last summer my friend Soleil Ho published an essay about growing up watching *Sailor Moon*, a Japanese cartoon about teenage girls who have supernatural powers and are also totally vulnerable and human. She writes:

I realize now that being a girl (or identifying as one) is one of the hardest roles to inhabit in this world. A girl is supposed to be so many things - attractive, graceful, polite, quiet, valuable, valueless - but none of those traits guarantee that she'll be taken seriously as a thinking and feeling human being. On the other hand, the absence of those traits can often invite violence or, at the very least, judgment. When we say that all girls are powerful, we often refrain from explaining just what

kind of power we're talking about. The power that I want girls to have certainly includes the power to govern their own bodies, but also something else entirely. [...] In order to save the people she loves, [Sailor Moon] fights and gets hurt and breaks down and even completely fails at times. And when she can manage it, she tries to save the monsters, too. (*Interrupt*, 2014)

The world is hard on girls, growing up is painful, and teen witch Tasha is a fighter just trying to get by. After a round of equally strong callbacks, we cast Paeka and started the hunt for her sisters.

I am the oldest of three sisters, and casting for the the right trio dynamic was very important to me. So we held a couple days of round-robin chemistry auditions. Paeka ran through the same scene multiple times with a series of different talented actors, but she had immediate chemistry with a sparkling twenty-something actor named Alessandra. The pair antagonized each other playfully, took up each other's space, seemed to be challenging each other. Add a nine-year-old spark-plug named Paulet to the mix, and we suddenly had the vibrant and possibly volatile family dynamic I recognized from my own childhood.

At this point, time was running short, and so I squeezed in as many rehearsals (though fewer than I would have liked) into the weeks left before production as possible. We spent these rehearsals working through scenes together but perhaps more importantly having honest conversations about growing up and feeling powerless. I brought crystals and strings and had them to invent magic spells to cure broken hearts and skinned knees. We practiced levitating apples with our eyes.

More than anything I was trying to create magic spaces, some sort of touchstone experience we could recall together when things got crazy on set. I was hoping to get them into the mindset of vulnerability and listening, but it would take a little more time

and some growing pains for us to get there. Principal photography was spiraling closer and closer, and honestly I think my attention was split. Here is a thing I had to relearn: always be present.

Meanwhile, my team was still desperately hunting for a Lot location. Our best hope, a vast and beautifully decaying parking lot at the undeveloped edge of the Mueller development, had fallen through. So Lauren took a second, closer look at some of the locations Kim from the Texas Film Commission had sent us. And that's how we found the Freescale Lot.

Stunningly overgrown and covered in post-industrial rust and concrete, this enormous abandoned section of a dwindling semiconductor factory appeared to be utterly perfect; trekking through that lot with Jim felt like stepping through the wardrobe. The landscape and aging structures seemed to have emerged out of the script: here was the shady alcove where Tasha finds the nest for the first time, here was the little culvert stream where the giant fish is lurking, here was the very spot, half-lit in mournful sun slanting down between girders, where Denise turns to stone. With Lauren's help and a note of confidence from Andy Garrison, the company that managed the lot rented the property to us for a much-reduced fee.

For weeks leading up to this, Jim and I had been watching films and discussing abstracted visual choices. But now that we knew our exact landscape, we could begin storyboarding in earnest. And once again, the scope of what we were doing seemed to expand beneath our feet. Even when we were brutally efficient and cut any shot that was not absolutely necessary, our storyboard was still fifty-five pages long. (See Appendix B for just a few excerpts.)

My greatest fear (right then and also at every stage of production and again now as I write this very report) was running out of time. Had I begun something too enormous? Were there not enough days in the shoot, not enough hours in any day, not enough sleep in my body to sustain me? Despite immense fundraising efforts, this movie was putting me into enormous debt. Despite months and months of thorough pre-production, it was still taking over my every waking moment. Over and over again I wondered why I hadn't written a movie about two people sitting in a room having a conversation.

But at the same time, I cared more about this story than anything I'd ever written before. I cared about these three girls and their bird monster, about the world they lived in, about the rust on the rocks at their feet. And Kelly and Natalie were there with me at every step, protecting this movie, willing it to life. Here is another thing I learned: love keeps the ship afloat.

5: Production

The night before we began production on *Middle Witch*, Kelly gave me a note she likes to keep on her person while directing. It has a list of reminders on it, and my favorite is this: “Trust the work.” While there’s always uncertainty in filmmaking of this scale, it is a comfort to remember that I can rely on the work itself. It is hard, and I know I wouldn’t still be here if I didn’t absolutely love it.

What I am getting around to telling you is that production was incredibly difficult and also chock full of joy. It was a long shoot, in broad daylight in a Texas summer, with children and a rabbit and a dog and bathrooms ten minutes away by car and a grown man overheating inside a feathered bird puppet. Every day we lost time to heat exhaustion and tricky PFX choreography.

But the crew were hearty and kind, and in each day there were also moments when the sun hit the trees just right and even to the naked eye the practical effects were indiscernible from real magic. The most beautiful thing about finally being on set after all that preparation is that you have no choice but to focus. Kelly also said to me the night before we began, “It’s here now, so you just face it.” And that was freeing.

This production also had more moving pieces than any set I’d worked on before. There were always creature effects to prepare, giant bird nests to truck in, special effects concrete make-up to apply, and I found myself making the rounds to all the departments to check in and then needing to step away to focus my thoughts on story and performance. Carrying a binder full of script notes, storyboards, and visual references proved immensely helpful.

I also very quickly figured out that insulating the actors from all of the commotion was going to be important to keeping the show on road, so we set up designated quiet

tents for the actors and their parents, and I made a point to spend time with them each individually. They were doing strenuous work for long hours, and the stress wore on each of them differently. When personalities conflicted, we took walks away from set and did listening exercises. In the end, I love the performances we were able to get during production. And I love how much my cast taught me about directing.

It also goes without saying that I'm thrilled with the footage we got during production. Working with Jim on this project was a total delight. He shoots beautifully, he leads a crew with remarkable warmth and energy, and he puts so much of himself into his work.

I also realized during production that having had so many departments to manage in pre-production, so many artists to direct, allowed me to get a strong sense of the world of my film early on. My production designers Michael Krauss and Thoa Nguyen needed to know how Lot-magic worked before they could build the cursed concrete patches, and Jason and his team of creature designers needed to know the history of the enlarged local fauna, and Victoria Prescott, my costume designer, needed to know about the colors and textures that best fit each of the girls.

So I had made firm world building decisions, informed by story and intended to shape design, long before we got to set. And that foundation was the bedrock of my confidence when we got to set.

The scale of this production also threw into sharp relief the importance of curating one's entire crew very intentionally. Constructing departments with an eye for compatible personalities and equitable set dynamics makes a world of difference especially when everyone is going to spend a lot of time hot and tired. Something else that makes a world of difference? Ice water in spray bottles and daily popsicle runs.

In the end, the pleasures of being on this set far outnumbered any of the difficulties. And I will never grow tired of the hush that falls over a bustling crew during a take or the sudden lurch back to life after the camera cuts. A group of good hearts and brains and hands working in chorus toward a story, toward the right light, toward the right quiet, feels like church to me. I came out of production utterly spent, but being at the heart of the a set's clockwork was well worth it.

6: *Post-Production*

For as long as I've been editing my own work, I've been watching Qian Zhuang edit hers. The closest I come to accurately describing the emotional process of editing is with needlework metaphors. Mine is a sturdy saddle-stitch, structurally sound, loose ends reinforced by doubling back. But Qian's needlework is elegant. Nips and fine creases in time and light, invisible stitches, clean hems with precisely enough breathing room to turn corners.

Editing is also psychological, private, lonely, impossible to steer with mere force of will. It requires a freshness of mind and a clarity of intention. Coming out of production I had neither of those things. I had a severe case of poison ivy dermatitis and a giant bird head on my kitchen counter. Fortunately for me, Qian had come on board as *Middle Witch's* editor months before.

At the beginning of my time in the RTF program I could not have imagined working with an editor. This is because I struggle with giving up power; I am picky and exacting, and I am impatient with the emotional work it takes to explain a task when it seems it would be quicker to take on the task myself.

But I am happy to say that I am older and fatter and wiser now, and I trust Qian completely. She is instinctual and economical, and I have learned so much simply by sitting and watching her work. That doesn't mean it wasn't sometimes bewildering to let

someone else make decisions about your work, but it turns out that movies (and lives) are made better by doing the work of collaborating.

I heard Linda Woolverton give a talk last year ago about writing for someone else. She said the outward pressure forces you to distill the heart of your intent and be willing to compromise everything around it. And that kind of laser-focusing only makes your work better. I love that. Collaboration make you grow. It is hard work and it is good.

Qian and I picture-locked two months ago, and I love the edit. She found very tender honest moments in the footage I had missed myself, and she gave shape and rhythm to all of the action sequences. Since then, though, my post-production experience has been harrowing. Preparing for the final mix, working with my composer on my score, doing my own VFX and animations, and finding time to write this report have collectively done a number on me. I've been immensely fortunate that Qian and Natalie and Jim continued to be deeply involved in the process, repeatedly staying up through long nights with me to give feedback and make changes, but I can no longer tell when I am hungry or tired. I can sit at a computer working for ten hours and suddenly realize I have sort of panic buzzing in my chest. I have to go through a list in my head: When was the last time I ate? Slept? Went outside? Stood up?

At the same time, this last tornado of constant frantic work has been full of small triumphs. I taught myself how to simulate realistic water-surface reflections and felt like I

had discovered fire. The resonating, scraping footsteps my sound designer Samantha Skinner added to the crawling nest gave it sudden power and heft. And last night during a color session, my colorist Simon Quiroz played some purple into the shadows of the last shot of the film, and it was so beautiful I thought I might cry.

In the end I am proud of this film. I am proud of the work and care and time and sheer physical stubborn-ness my whole team put into it, right up until the minutes before my final committee meeting. And I'm so glad to have spent the last three and half years in this MFA program.

As I prepare to move on, I'm hoping to find daytime work as a VFX artist and animator and continue developing my own work on the side, beginning perhaps with writing a script for a feature version of this very film. But this general plan is abstract, and I'm still unsure of how to tackle the mundane details of post-graduation. What I *am* confident of is this: I leave now equipped with the creative mindset, the collaborative relationships, and the practical tools to continue growing as a filmmaker.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: *Script*

Script begins on following page.

EXT. LOT - STREET LAMP ROW - MORNING

Beneath a huge, pale sky stretches an abandoned parking lot completely overgrown with tall weeds. Nothing breaks the horizon but a skeletal row of rusted street lamps.

An unusual bird CRIES.

EXT. LOT - STATUE FIELD - MORNING

A scattering of concrete rabbits crouch low in the weeds in postures of terror. Beside them stands a concrete sparrow whose head is forever tilted to one side as if listening.

Soft WING-BEATS. A ragged shadow drifts over the tableau.

EXT. LOT/NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

Here the outer fringe of the lot gives way to a row of tired townhouses crowded along a chain-link fence.

One gate is strung with little golden bells and red thread.

A distant kettle WHISTLE cuts the silence.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Steam shoots out of a SCREAMING copper kettle on the stove.

DENISE CARVER (18) frowns bleary-eyed into the empty fridge. She raises a hand, SNAPS her fingers once, and the burner under the kettle turns itself off.

She yawns and then hollers over her shoulder:

DENISE
Tasha!

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

TASHA CARVER, fourteen and wearing stacks of sun-faded friendship bracelets, sticks her head out her bedroom door.

TASHA
I'm up! Stop yelling already!

The hall outside her door is cluttered: a baseball bat, some purple crystals, and a rabbit skull decorated with gold star-stickers.

Denise leans out the kitchen door.

DENISE
I could've sworn Mom said she was
leaving food money.

TASHA
Check the teapot.

Denise disappears back into the kitchen.

Someone GROANS dramatically, and Tasha looks down to find
CECE CARVER (9) sprawled on the floor, a flashlight clutched
to her chest.

TASHA (CONT'D)
You have a bed, Cece.

CECE
It's just my flashlight died.

Tasha grabs the baseball cap hanging from her doorknob and
hops over Cece to trot down the hallway.

TASHA
If you're gonna leave it on all
night you have to put new batteries
in.

As Tasha passes the kitchen door, Denise appears and thrusts
a blue teapot at her. Without breaking stride, Tasha plucks
several wrinkled dollar bills out of it.

Cece scrambles up and chases after her.

EXT. BACK YARD - DAY

A sagging back porch overlooks a pocket-sized yard and the
overgrown lot beyond the fence.

Tasha bursts out the back door and flops down on the porch
stairs to pull on sneakers. She wears the cap backwards, and
there are friendship bracelets on her ankles, too.

Cece pushes herself halfway out the kitchen window on her
elbows, bumping into wind chimes and a string of drying
herbs.

CECE
I did put new batteries in! I think
it's broken.

When Tasha looks back over her shoulder, Cece is holding the flashlight and waggling her eyebrows hopefully.

Tasha grins in spite of herself. Then she lifts one hand and SNAPS her fingers.

In response, the flashlight makes a POPPING SOUND and flickers weakly.

Cece frowns.

CECE (CONT'D)
I'll just ask Denise.

Tasha glances at her sharply, stung.

CECE (CONT'D)
Oh and she says get skim milk, too.

Denise leans out a different window. Curtains printed with stars billow around her.

DENISE
Get skim milk, too!

Tasha sets her jaw and heads over to where her bike leans against the fence. There are tarot cards stuck in its spokes.

DENISE (CONT'D)
And don't you cut through the lot!

TASHA
Oh my GOD I KNOW.

When Tasha yanks her bike up, the tiny gold bells strung along the gate jingle.

SUPERIMPOSE: MIDDLE WITCH

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

A normal convenience store. LULU (45) sits behind the register reading newspaper horoscopes through thick glasses.

Tasha slaps a box of toaster pastries on the counter and then one, two, three grapefruit.

Lulu gazes at her over the top of her glasses.

LULU
You're out early for a Saturday.

Tasha plunks down a sweating milk carton and then notices a display of plastic flashlights by the counter. She inspects a purple one.

TASHA

Denise is home for the weekend.

After a moment's hesitation, Tasha adds the purple flashlight to the pile.

LULU

Perfect Denise? No wonder your horoscope is so bleak. Listen.

Lulu snaps the crease out of her newspaper.

TASHA

Not today, Lulu.

LULU

"Beware, Gemini! Trouble brews in your darkest heart. Sharpen your knives and move fast, but take care to watch your step. Also buy a lottery ticket."

Tasha glares at her and drops some money on the counter.

TASHA

(deadpan)

Thanks a bunch, Lulu.

Tasha stalks off with her groceries and Lulu goes back to reading but absently adds:

LULU

Don't make any dumb choices.

The bell over the door jingles as it swings shut.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Tasha sullenly stuffs everything into the milk-crate on the back of her bike.

She scowls back over her shoulder at the store and then across the street to a jagged gap in the chain-link fence that bounds the lot on all sides.

Beyond it, wind moves through the weeds like a wave through water. The HUM of cicadas might as well be siren song.

Tasha's gaze narrows. Her nostrils flare.

EXT. LOT - DRAINAGE DITCH - DAY

A wide pool of oily water at the bottom of a drainage ditch reflects the cloudless sky. From atop the culvert pipe, a cat gazes down into the water, intent on something unseen.

Suddenly Tasha flies past, pedaling hard, a look like satisfaction on her face.

EXT. LOT - STREET LAMP ROW - DAY

She races along the row of rusty street lamps. Thick weeds whip against her ankles, and a rangy jackrabbit bounds along beside her for a moment.

EXT. LOT - NEST HOME - DAY

Tasha abruptly hits a rut in the buckled pavement, and the jolt sends the flashlight flying.

Tasha skids to a halt just in time to see it bounce down a slope and land at the foot of an enormous NEST on a dislodged slab of concrete.

In the middle of the nest sits a sea-foam green EGG. It's the size of a cantaloupe and glows as if lit from within.

Tasha approaches slowly, transfixed. When she wipes her sweaty palms on her shorts and gently picks up the egg, it washes her arms and face in turquoise light and HUMS softly.

Tasha gazes down at it and drums her fingers thoughtfully on its pebbled surface.

Then she tucks the egg in her bike-crate. She leaves the flashlight in its place in the nest.

EXT. BACK YARD/LOT - DAY

Cece lays on her stomach on the porch, carefully scribbling triangles on a huge star chart.

Her concentration is broken by a JANGLING of bells when Tasha unlocks the back gate. Cece sits up, eyes wide.

CECE

YOU are gonna be in TROUBLE.

Tasha slams the noisy gate shut.

TASHA

Man, I wish everyone would stop predicting my future. Where's Denise?

CECE

On the phone.

TASHA

Want to see something cool?

Cece grins wickedly and hops off the porch.

CECE

Yeah!

Tasha gently lifts the glowing egg from the crate and passes it to her. It dwarfs Cece's small hands.

CECE (CONT'D)

Whoa.

TASHA

Right? This thing doesn't need batteries.

Cece beams up at Tasha, the soft turquoise glow glinting in her eyes. She hugs the egg.

CECE

It's warm. What's inside? A dragonet?

TASHA

Not this close to the city.

CECE

A slow creep?

TASHA

Nah. They lay their eggs in water.

Cece scrutinizes the egg, brow furrowed.

CECE

Denise'll know.

Denise pokes her head out the open screen door with a phone balanced on her shoulder.

DENISE

Denise'll know what?

Tasha sidesteps Cece to block the egg from view.

TASHA

Nothing.

Denise gives her a hard, shrewd look.

DENISE

(into the phone)

I gotta go, Naomi.

Tasha sighs, and Cece peeks around her, eyes enormous.

Denise strides out onto the porch and crooks a finger at Cece until she inches out sheepishly, egg cradled to her chest.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Where did that come from?

Tasha crosses her arms and shrugs with calculated disdain.

TASHA

I got it for Cece.

DENISE

You cut through the lot.

TASHA

So? Nothing happened.

Denise cocks an eyebrow and puts a fist on her hip.

DENISE

Doesn't look like nothing happened.
Looks like you brought unidentified
supernatural fauna inside the gate.

Cece looks back and forth between them, anxious.

TASHA

It's just an EGG, Denise.

Denise shakes her head in disbelief. She jabs an accusing finger at the egg.

DENISE

THAT is clearly not just an egg,
Tasha. You know better!

Tasha's face darkens. Somewhere far off, a bird SCREAMS.

TASHA

Stop acting like you're Mom.

DENISE

Sure! As soon as you stop acting
like an overgrown child.

Distant WINGBEATS. Cece tears her eyes away from the argument
to look up at the sky.

TASHA

(to Denise)

Why can't you ever you just leave
me alone?!

An enormous shadow passes over the yard, circles back. Cece
takes a few steps away from the other girls to get a better
view.

CECE

Whoaaa. You guys.

DENISE

(yelling at Tasha)

Oh, believe me, I'd rather do
anything but stay here keeping your
ass out of trouble all weekend!

CECE

YOU GUYS.

TASHA

(yelling at Denise)

So go, then! I don't need you!

Cece SCREAMS. There's a confusing flurry of movement, a
terrible beating of wings, and suddenly she's gone.

Tasha and Denise stare at the empty space in the grass where
she was standing.

DENISE

Cece!

TASHA

Cece!

The egg drops out of the sky and lands with a thud at Tasha's
feet, unharmed. Several long feathers drift down beside it.

Denise and Tasha turn their frantic faces upward.

Cece, kicking and screaming, is clutched in the talons of an
enormous, terrible bird flying due south across the lot.

Tasha gapes, horrified and frozen, but Denise is already
wrenching the back gate open and racing out into the lot
barefoot. A breath later Tasha is running too.

But the creature makes incredible speed. It's already a small shape on the horizon, and Cece's screams have almost faded under the drone of cicadas.

Denise turns on Tasha, livid, gasping.

DENISE
You NEVER steal from this lot!

Her voice rings across the empty lot. She points the direction the bird went, and her whole arm shakes.

DENISE (CONT'D)
That thing was the mother, Tasha!
You led it straight here.

Eyes huge with panic, Tasha covers her mouth with both hands.

TASHA
(through her hands)
We have to call Mom and Dad.

Denise shakes her head.

DENISE
Their plane doesn't land for hours.

Tasha stares out at the empty horizon, ashen.

TASHA
Denise. What do we do.

DENISE
We move fast.

Denise turns on her heel and starts toward the house.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Denise yanks things out of cupboards and Tasha shoves them into a backpack: a big rose-colored crystal, a mean-looking knife in a leather sheath, a canister of pepper spray.

Face drawn, Tasha glances once at the egg which sits on the kitchen table, glowing steadily. Then she packs a first-aid kit, a box of matches, the lid from the blue teapot.

EXT. BACKYARD/LOT - DAY

Denise marches stone-faced out the gate and into the lot, knife on her hip, heavy boots on her feet, and the egg tucked under one arm like a football.

Tasha, her baseball bat sticking out of her backpack and a purple crystal hanging from her neck on a piece of twine, has to run to catch up.

DENISE
Where'd you find it?

TASHA
In a nest. That way.

She points southeast across the interminable lot. Denise frowns in that direction and then looks hard at Tasha.

DENISE
You sure? That's not the way they
flew.

Tasha swallows and then nods once, firmly.

Denise's gaze narrows, and her nostrils flare.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Fine.

Tasha turns to keep walking, but Denise reaches out and yanks her back violently.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Careful!

Tasha's toe is inches from the chalky edge of an uneven patch of bleach-white pavement.

She swallows, eyes wide. All around them wherever the pavement is afflicted stand tiny, terrible sculptures: concrete mice and birds frozen in states of panic.

TASHA
Are they statues?

DENISE
No.

Suddenly a jackrabbit darts out of the brush and across the white ground. Within seconds he petrifies: feet first, then torso, then frantic eyes and twitching ears.

The girls give the concrete jackrabbit a sober look. Then Denise nudges Tasha toward a clear path.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Just watch your step.

They keep going.

EXT. LOT - OPEN LANDSCAPE

A wipe of dark feathers reveals Cece curled in a tight ball in the center of a nest just her size while a gargantuan bird of prey frantically scrabbles at her arms with its hooked beak.

Finally Cece flails out and her fist connects soundly with that beak, surprising the creature back for a moment.

Cece scrambles out from under it and flattens herself against the edge of the nest.

CECE
STOP IT! I don't have your stupid
egg!

There are tear-streaks on her dusty cheeks, and big raw scratches along her tiny shoulders. She holds up her hands to show that they're empty.

The bird blinks its three sea-foam green eyes in shock, and then screams directly into Cece's face, an anguished sound like sheet metal being torn.

Then the distraught bird launches itself up into the sky.

EXT. LOT - NEST HOME - DAY

Tasha and Denise stand over a crater of broken concrete. Tasha shakes her head in disbelief.

TASHA
It was right here!

Several tiny chunks of concrete inch along the ground. One butts up against Denise's foot, and she frowns down at it.

DENISE
Was it on something?

TASHA
Just concrete.

Tasha follows Denise's gaze, and her face falls.

DENISE
Not just concrete.

TASHA
(under her breath)
Crawlers.

EXT. LOT - OPEN LANDSCAPE - DAY

Another bird SCREAM recedes into the distance, and Cece casts around fearfully as the nest begins to rumble and jerk.

She crawls uneasily to her knees and inches carefully to the edge of the shuddering nest only to discover that she's eight feet off the ground and traveling.

The concrete slab on which the nest was sitting has hoisted itself up on monstrous dirt-crusting crab-legs and now trundles deliberately across a sea of broken concrete.

EXT. LOT - NEST HOME - DAY

Denise drops to one knee at the edge of the crater where the nest once stood and sets the egg down.

TASHA

It could be anywhere now.

Denise pulls a felt book of sewing needles from her pocket.

DENISE

Get the garlic.

Tasha extracts one papery head of garlic from her backpack.

Denise breaks a clove off. She sticks a sewing needle into its pointed tip and then balances the clove like a little teetering boat on the very top of the egg.

Denise sits back on her heels and SNAPS her fingers. Both girls hold their breath.

After a moment the clove begins to turn on its axis, the needle-tip swinging in a circle and gathering speed. It spins several times and then stops abruptly, pointing due west.

DENISE (CONT'D)

That way.

Denise pops the needle back in the book and cracks the skin of the clove off. She breaks the clove in two, pops one half into her mouth, and gives the other to Tasha.

Tasha makes a face but eats it. She picks up the egg this time, and they head westward down the hill.

TASHA

Did Mom teach you that one?

DENISE
Nope. I made it up.

TASHA
How do you know it worked?

DENISE
"Magic is invention—"

TASHA
"—and trust." I know. I just don't think I trust garlic and a sewing needle.

DENISE
Okay, A: nothing is more trustworthy than a sewing needle.

Denise is walking faster than Tasha, her long legs cutting swaths in the tall weeds. Tasha has to jog now to keep up.

DENISE (CONT'D)
And B: it's more about trusting your instincts than your ingredients. You work with what you have.

Denise hops a crack in the pavement, and Tasha follows suit.

TASHA
But *garlic*?

DENISE
Garlic's a seed, and eggs and seeds are sisters.
(beat)
And sisters *listen* to each other.

Tasha glares at Denise, but instead of snapping back she just sets her jaw and focuses on where to put her feet.

EXT. LOT - OPEN LANDSCAPE - DAY

Cece tries to climb out of the nest, but with the crawler lurching around she can't get a sturdy footing.

Instead she gets up on her knees, uses her thumbs and forefingers to make a triangle shape around her mouth, and yells through it:

CECE
Deniiiiiiise!

Her magically-amplified voice BOOMS across the hills.

EXT. LOT - DRAINAGE DITCH - DAY

Denise and Tasha stop in their tracks, eyes wide. Cece's voice still echoes.

TASHA
How close was that?

DENISE
Close.

Tasha spins on her heel, scanning the horizon. Her eyes land on a single rusty lamp-post choked by thick vines and leaning over drainage ditch. She runs for it.

TASHA
(over her shoulder)
Come give me a boost!

DENISE
Tasha, wait.

Denise jogs after, skirting a murky pool fed by the drainage ditch. Unseen by the girls, something white and huge moves in the watery depths.

Tasha sets the egg on the ground, inches from the edge of the water, and yanks on one of the thicker vines. It doesn't budge.

TASHA
See? It's safe.

DENISE
Okay, but not too high.

Denise helps hoists Tasha up and then cranes her neck to watch her climb.

DENISE (CONT'D)
Anything?

Tasha shields her eyes against the afternoon sun. She grins.

TASHA
The nest's just over that hill! But
it's moving.

Denise hears a GLUB and then a PLOP. She stares down at her feet. The egg is gone, and there are ripples in the crater-pool a foot away.

A spiny, white fin slices up through the surface of the water.

DENISE

No! No no no.

Tasha looks down to see Denise crouched at the edge of the pool, peering frantically into the grimy water. She climbs down without any help.

TASHA

What is it?

DENISE

Lot Fish eat light, Tasha.

Tasha realizes the egg is gone and drops to her knees, too. A couple fat bubbles rise through the oily water and pop at the surface.

Denise chews her bottom lip, stares into the water. She seems stuck for once, frozen.

But Tasha yanks open the front pocket of Denise's backpack.

TASHA

Where'd you put those matches?

Denise frowns, skeptical.

DENISE

In the zipper pocket.

Tasha unearths the tiny box of matches and slides it open. Two skinny matches.

Tasha fumbles a match against the strike-strip, but it takes a second flick to ignite. Still crouched, Tasha holds the little flame out over the dark water.

Finally getting the drift, Denise kneels close to her and stretches her own arms over the water, wiggles her fingers as if preparing to catch a ball.

DENISE (CONT'D)

A little higher?

Tasha gets up on her knees, lifting the match about a foot above Denise's hands. The flame is eating up the match quickly, and Tasha inches her fingers to the very end of it.

Down in the deeps, something large and white stirs.

The flame reaches Tasha's fingertips and she hisses, drops the match into the water where it sizzles and sinks.

Denise quickly lights the last match and hands it over. This time Tasha blows on it slightly so that it flutters like a living thing.

Immediately a white fish the size of a cello lunges straight up out of the oily water, its terrible gaping mouth wide open.

In a blink Denise has tackled the awful thing and heaved it onto the shore where it flips its translucent tail in the dirt. Its bulging belly glows sea foam green from within.

The girls stand over the fish while it dies on the buckled pavement. Its gills flutter.

DENISE (CONT'D)

That was really smart, Tasha.

Tasha shrugs but her cheeks go rosy.

The fish finally stills. Denise pulls the knife from her hip and crouches over it.

TASHA

Be careful. The egg.

Denise cocks an eyebrow at the younger girl, studies her face for a moment. Then she flips the knife and offers it to her.

Tasha closes her mouth. She looks at the huge fish, at the knife. She shakes her head.

Denise watches this. Finally she reaches down and slices open the creature's gristly belly herself. Guts and greasy blood spill out over the blade.

Kneeling beside her, Tasha peels up flesh and tugs out the egg, which still glows through the muck.

Denise wipes the knife in some weeds, and the two girls look at each other over the body of the fish.

There's a distant, mournful BIRD SCREAM, nearly lost on the wind. Both girls jerk their faces westward.

DENISE

Cece!

They're off and running.

EXT. LOT - OPEN AIR - DAY

The afternoon sun casts gathering clouds in splashes of lavender, and the bird hurtles through the sky, searching the lot with sharp eyes and CRYING out, distressed.

EXT. LOT - SECOND STATUE FIELD - DAY

Tasha and Denise race west across the lot, hurdling wide cracks in the concrete and startling birds out of the brush.

They crest a hilltop and pause, breathing heavily, to scan the horizon. Due west and a quarter-mile off: the crawler.

DENISE

There!

Tasha starts forward, but Denise stops with a lurch and a gasp. Her foot is stuck fast. Denise looks down and her eyes go wide with terror, her whole body rigid with shock.

Tasha stops, too, and follows her gaze down to see Denise's left foot planted squarely on a chalky patch of bleach-white pavement.

All around the girls, low in the brush and unnoticed until now, are rats and birds and a single jackrabbit, all frozen in concrete.

Denise's lower leg has already petrified and fused to the ground, and the chalky concrete is moving up her thigh now.

Frantic, Tasha drops the egg and lunges for Denise's arm, but the older girl jerks back.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Don't! Don't touch me!

TASHA

What do I do?

Her eyes filling with tears, Denise slowly shakes her head.

DENISE

Get Cece.

Tasha shakes her head in horror. The concrete has reached Denise's waist.

TASHA

No. No no no.

DENISE

Listen to me, Tasha. Right now. I
trust you.

The concrete inches up Denise's chest, and Tasha chokes back
a sob, her hands still outstretched and shaking.

TASHA

(yelling)
Stop it! Tell me what to do!

Denise shakes her head again, manages a tight, wistful smile
through her tears.

DENISE

I love you so much.

Then she inhales, and she's gone. Even her eyelashes are
concrete.

The only sound is the drone of cicadas.

TASHA

(raggedly)
No, come back.

Then Tasha breaks. She crumples to her knees and sobs into
the pavement, her whole body heaving with the force of it.

Above her Denise's statue gazes flatly into the distance.

Suddenly the monstrous bird SCREAMS, closer this time, and
Tasha straightens up like a sail against a mast.

TASHA (CONT'D)

(between gasps)
Cece.

She wipes her face with her sleeve and takes a long
shuddering breath.

Then she pulls out her baseball bat, zips the egg into her
backpack, and stands. She looks once at Denise's empty face.

Then Tasha turns and runs off across the lot toward the nest
some three hundred feet away, baseball bat gripped in one
hand and backpack glowing. All by herself.

EXT. LOT - OPEN LANDSCAPE - DAY

Cece crouches low in the nest, eyes big. She's watching
something circling high above her. A huge, dark shadow passes
over the nest.

The nest lurches over a dip in the pavement, and a purple flashlight rolls into Cece's foot. She picks it up, puzzled, and then hugs it to her chest.

EXT. LOT - OPEN LANDSCAPE - DAY

Tasha's feet pound the pavement. Tall weeds snap against her legs. A hundred feet away from the crawler — which is finally slowing to a halt — Tasha still can't see Cece.

TASHA
(yelling)
Cece!

Cece's head pops up over the lip of the nest, and Tasha nearly cries with relief.

Cece, clutching the purple flashlight and absolutely beaming, climbs down the steep side of the resting crawler.

But moments after her bare feet touch the ground, the enormous shadow passes overhead again.

With a terrible CLATTERING of talons, the bird lands on the stretch of concrete between the girls.

Tasha skids to a halt and stumbles back several steps.

The monster has a wingspan the length of a sofa. Steam curls from the edges of its hooked beak, and its three eyes are bright as embers.

It lunges and snaps its awful beak at Tasha's head, but she yelps and drops to a crouch just in time, swinging her baseball bat back behind her head.

As Tasha rotates her body the creature catches a glimpse of her backpack glowing green at its seams. The bird cocks its head, blinks each of its three eyes in turn.

And then in a flash it throws Tasha to the ground, knocking the wind out of her and pinning her flat with its talons.

Furious, the bird tears at the backpack with its hooked beak, tries to drag it out from under her, wrenching her arms violently. Tasha cries out in pain.

Cece is furious. She glances down at the flashlight in her hands and then hurls it at the bird.

It bounces off the back of the bird's skull, and the bird turns and SCREAMS at her, indignant and a little surprised.

Cece makes a triangle with her fingers and SCREAMS back. The bird startles back a step. It blinks, impressed.

Meanwhile, Tasha scrambles out from beneath the creature and gets to her feet. She tears her backpack off one shoulder and yanks out the egg.

When the bird spins back to face Tasha, its beak lands inches from the tip of her nose. Tasha holds her breath, eyes wide, and holds very, very still.

But the bird does not attack. Instead it observes the way Tasha cradles the egg to her chest: gently, protectively. And then it narrows its eyes and makes a low growling sound.

TASHA (CONT'D)

I know.

Tasha's voice breaks, and she swallows.

TASHA (CONT'D)

This is all my fault. I messed up,
and I'm sorry.

Tasha delicately sets the egg on the ground, but she doesn't lift her hands from it.

TASHA (CONT'D)

It wasn't mine to take.
(beat)
But *she* is.

Tasha lifts one hand from the egg to point to Cece.

TASHA (CONT'D)

She is mine.

The bird blinks again and seems to consider her words. It clicks its beak once, almost gently. Then, never breaking eye-contact, it steps to the side.

A clear path to Cece.

Tasha takes a deep breath and lifts her other hand from the egg. She walks toward Cece, slowly and deliberately.

When Tasha is two feet away, Cece practically tackles her. She wraps her arms around Tasha's waist and sobs openly into her T-shirt.

Tasha hugs her tight and then drops to her knees and kisses each side of her face.

Sniffing back her own tears, Tasha checks the scratches on Cece's shoulders. Then she hoists her up and carries her back past the bird.

It crouches low over its glowing egg and watches them warily, eyes gleaming.

Tasha nods at the bird once, respectfully, but keeps on walking, walks a very long time with Cece's face buried in her shoulder.

Cece peeks up at the bird once and sticks her tongue out.

EXT. LOT - SECOND STATUE FIELD - DAY

Still carrying Cece, Tasha approaches Denise's statue with a weary determination. When Tasha slows, Cece lifts her face and finally sees the figure. She makes a small, sad sound.

CECE
(very quietly)
Denise.

Five feet from the statue, Tasha sets Cece down.

TASHA
Watch where you step, okay?

Cece nods silently. She stands very close to Tasha and holds onto a fistful of Tasha's t-shirt.

Tasha kneels on the pavement and dumps out her backpack. She picks through the pile, through the crystals and knotted strings and garlic cloves. Cece crouches beside her.

CECE
What are you doing?

Tasha stops and stares down at the pile, brow furrowed. Wheels are turning.

TASHA
We have to work with what we have.

After a moment Tasha reaches past the pile and pries up a loose chunk of concrete the size of a softball. She frowns at it. Then a light bulb goes off.

Tasha sweeps the other objects to the side. She pounds the chunk of concrete against the hard ground. And then again.

Cece watches, baffled, as blow after blow Tasha reduces the hunk of crumbling concrete to a heap of gritty powder.

Then she takes the teapot lid and packs it full of the concrete dust.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Garlic.

Cece finds a clove of garlic and carefully pushes it down into the teapot lid, too.

Biting her lip in concentration, Tasha overturns the lid onto her own palm. Lifted away it leaves behind a dome-shaped mound of compacted concrete dust, garlic clove hidden within.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Invention and trust, right?

Cece nods uncertainly.

Tasha leans in close to her palm but lifts her gaze to Denise. She licks her dry lips. She blows.

A layer of the concrete powder billows out into air, and in the same instant several hunks of concrete crumble off of the sculpture's arms. Tasha blinks, surprised and delighted.

CECE

More!

Tasha blows again, and larger chunks of concrete drop from Denise's legs and torso like ice sliding off in a thaw.

Dust whirls out of Tasha's hand, and the hard surface of the figure cracks apart to reveal skin, cloth, hair.

Tasha blows the last of the dust off the clove of garlic, and Denise droops, still shedding fragments of cement but gasping for air now. Tasha lunges forward and catches her.

DENISE

(gasping)

You did it.

Tears run down Denise's face, leaving clean streaks in the dust. Beaming, Tasha reaches up and wipes the last crumbles of concrete from her cheeks.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Unable to take it any longer, Tasha buries her face in Denise's dusty shoulder, clutching her as if afraid she might float away. Denise squeezes back, grinning through her tears.

Bouncing from foot to foot and so happy she's practically incandescent, Cece finally bounds over and throws her arms around both their waists.

Denise untangles enough to sweep Cece up between the two of them. All three sisters laugh.

EXT. LOT - STREET LAMP ROW - DAY/NIGHT (SUNSET)

Sunset washes the sky a brilliant orange. Several electric purple fireflies flutter in the shadows of the street lamps.

EXT. LOT/NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

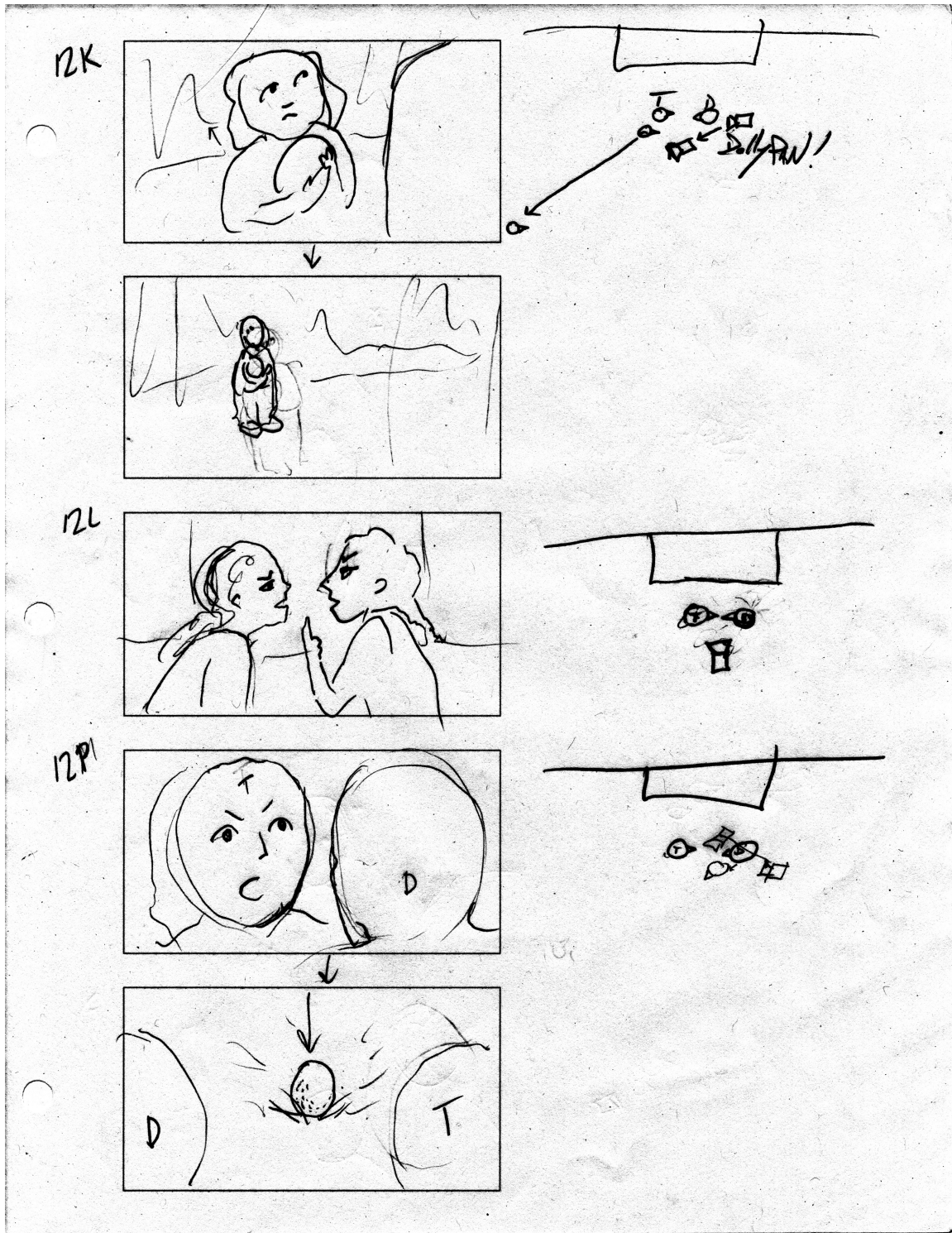
Warm light streams from every window of the Carver house. CRICKETS, distant TRAFFIC, MUSIC lilting from the old radio sitting on the windowsill. Three VOICES, talking and laughing. A gentle wind tugs at the bells on the closed gate, and they RING.

Appendix B: *Visual Materials*

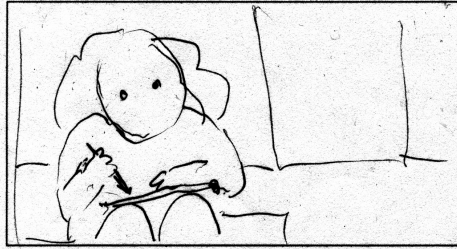
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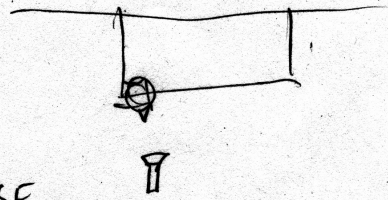
STORYBOARD EXCERPTS



12A



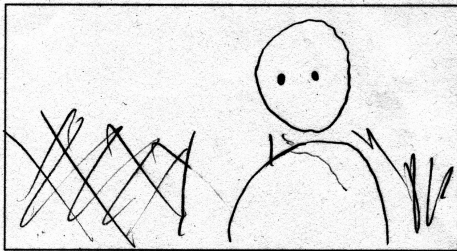
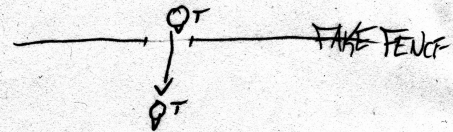
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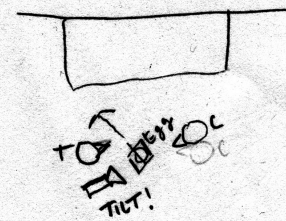
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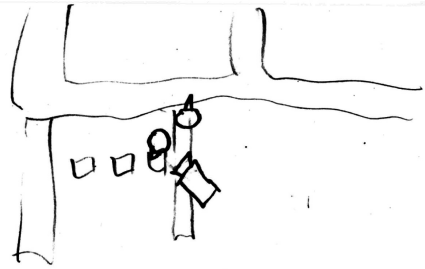
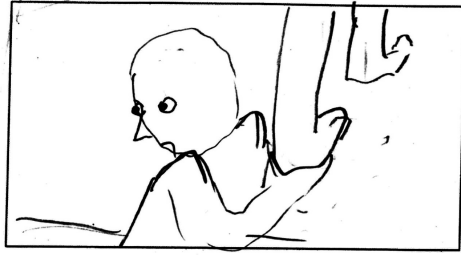
LOT



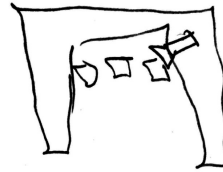
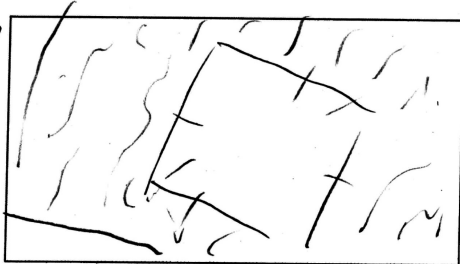
12C



20F



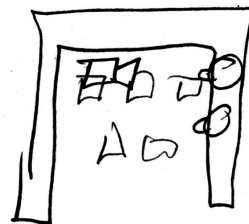
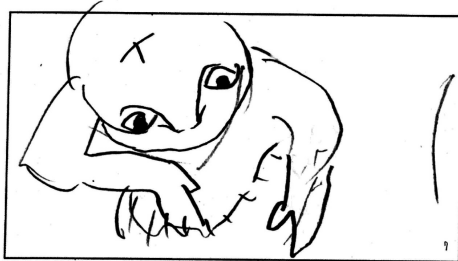
20G



20H



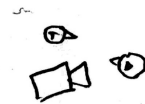
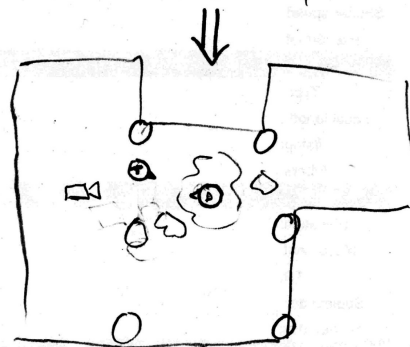
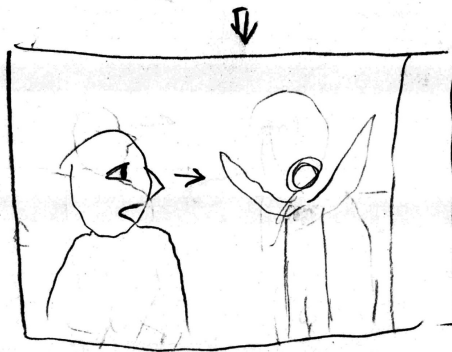
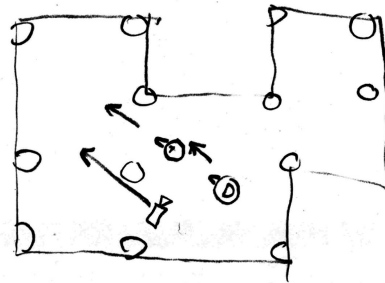
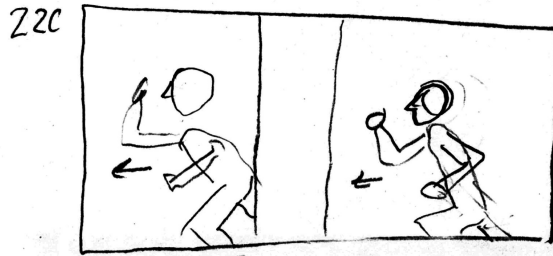
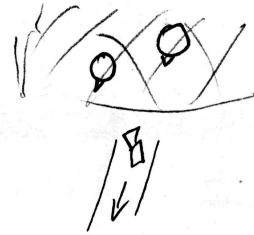
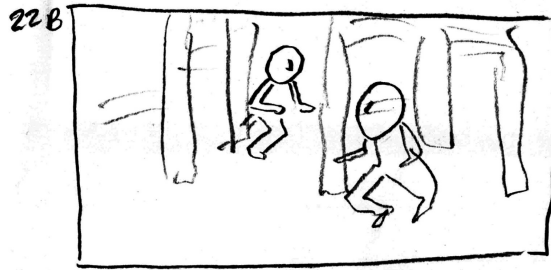
20I



20J



24



220



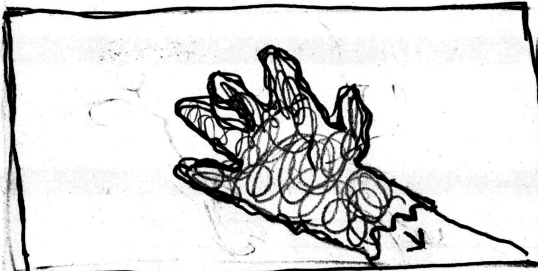
Q107
Q108

22J

Same framings
22F

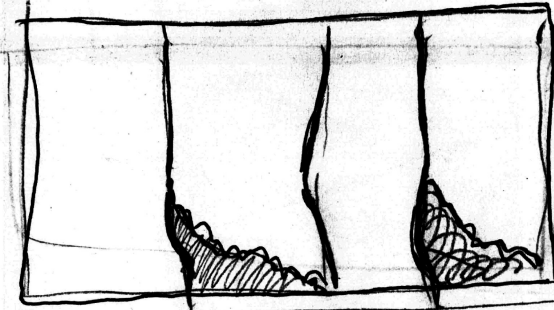
Q1
Q100

22K



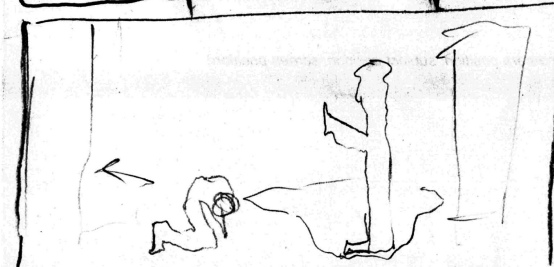
Q109
Q110
Q111

22L



Q112
Q113
Q114

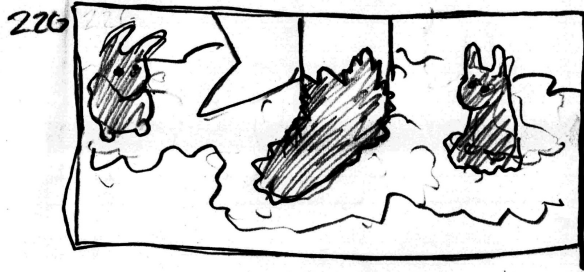
22N
(non Next
page)



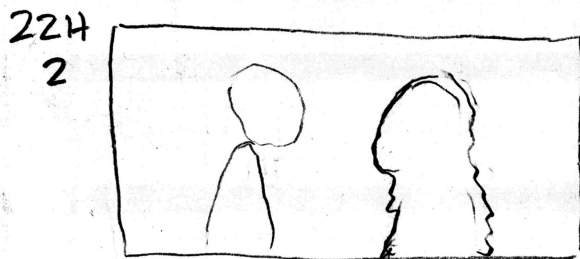
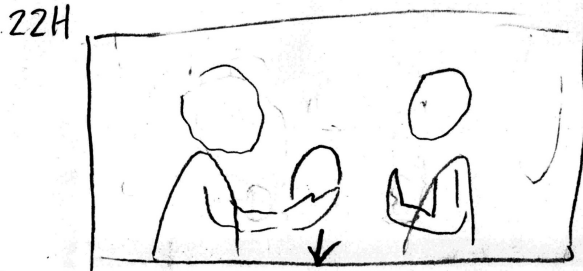
Q115

Q116
Q117
Q118

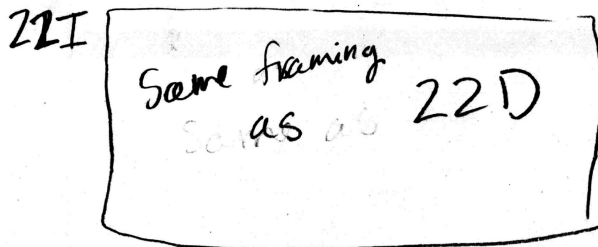
29



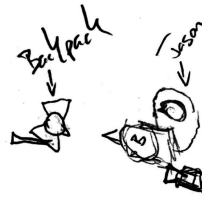
STAGE 1



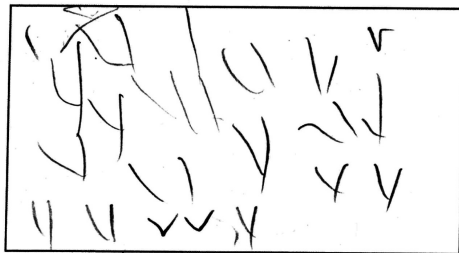
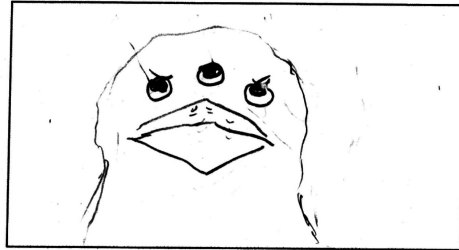
STAGE 4 miniature



24J



24
K

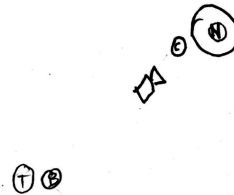


(feathery neck)

24
L

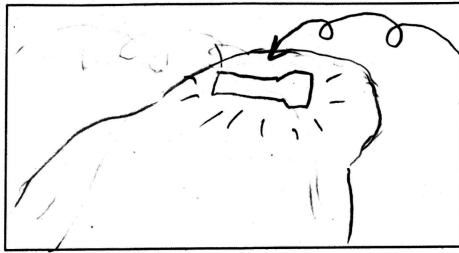


24
M



34

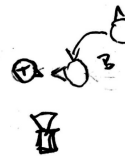
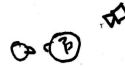
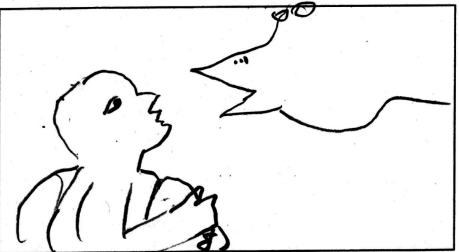
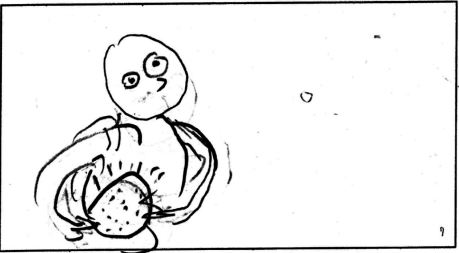
24
N



24 O



24 P



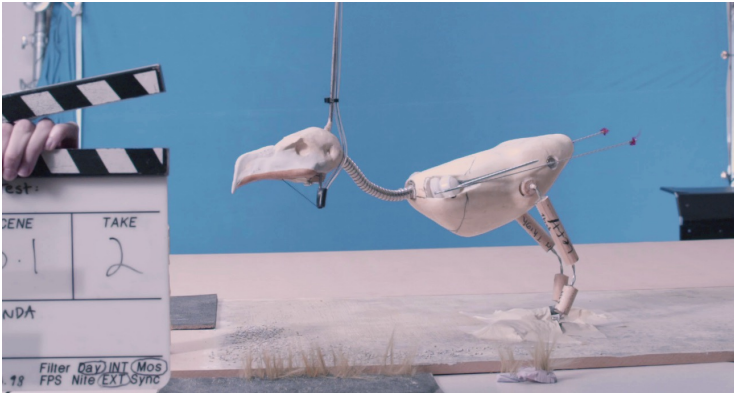
35

Appendix C: *Creature Effects*

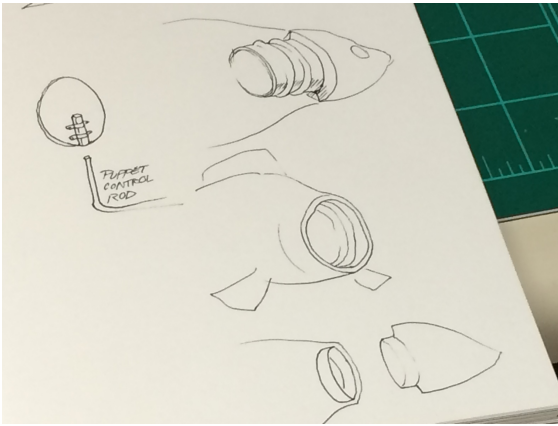
THE CRAWLER



THE BIRD



THE FISH



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